COLOSSEUM

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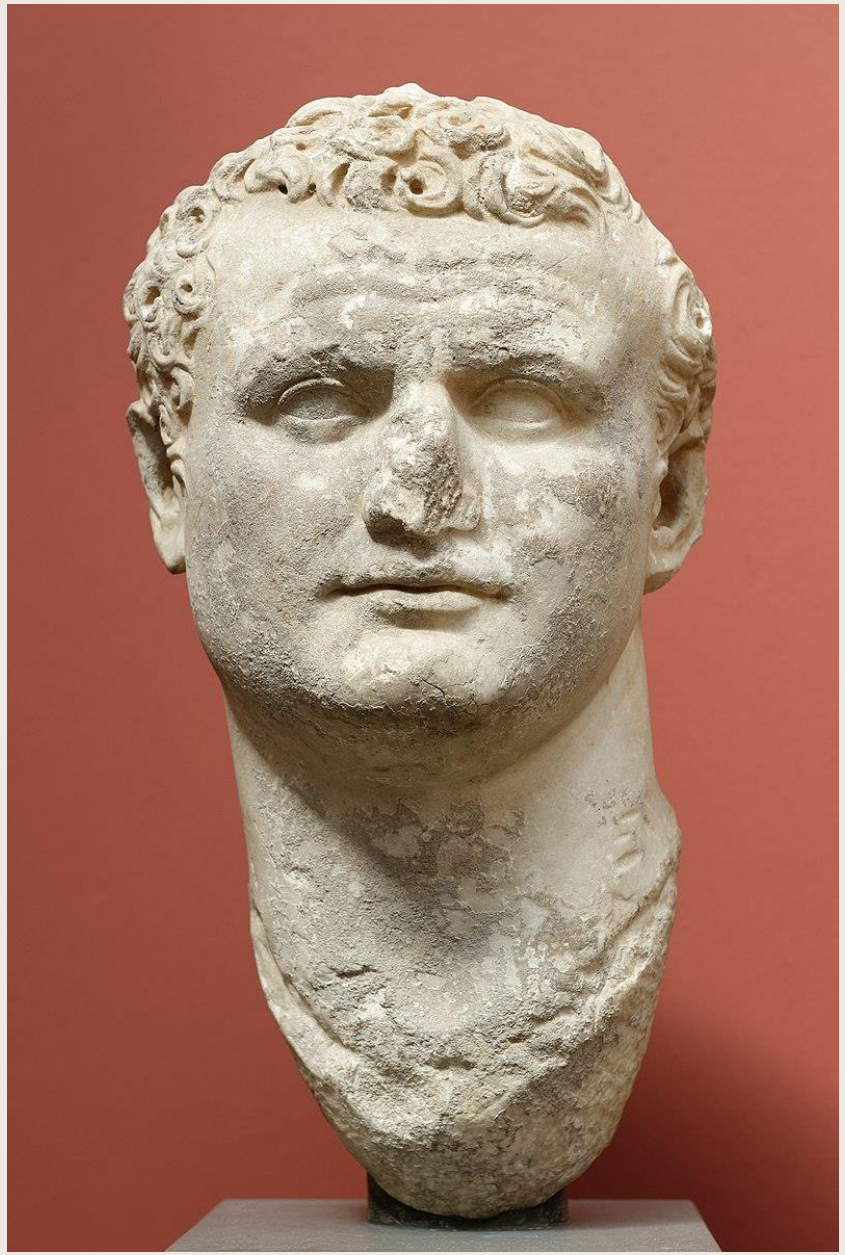
The Colosseum is an oval amphitheatre in the centre of the city of Rome, Italy, just east of the Roman Forum. It is the largest ancient amphitheatre ever built, and is still the largest standing amphitheatre in the world today, despite its age. Construction began under the emperor Vespasian (r. 69–79 AD) in 72 and was completed in 80 AD under his successor and heir, Titus (r. 79–81). Further modifications were made during the reign of Domitian (r. 81–96). The three emperors that were patrons of the work are known as the Flavian dynasty, and the amphitheatre was named the Flavian Amphitheatre (Latin: Amphitheatrum Flavium; Italian: Anfiteatro Flavio by later classicists and archaeologists for its association with their family name (Flavius).

The Colosseum is built of travertine limestone, tuff (volcanic rock), and brick-faced concrete. It could hold an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 spectators at various points in its history, having an average audience of some 65,000 it was used for gladiatorial contests and public spectacles including animal hunts, executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on Roman mythology, and briefly mock sea battles. The building ceased to be used for entertainment in the early medieval era. It was later reused for such purposes as housing, workshops, quarters for a religious order, a fortress, a quarry, and a Christian shrine.

Although substantially ruined by earthquakes and stone robbers taking spolia, the Colosseum is still an iconic symbol of Imperial Rome and was listed as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World. It is one of Rome's most popular tourist attractions and also has links to the Roman Catholic Church, as each Good Friday the Pope leads a torchlit "Way of the Cross" procession that starts in the area around the Colosseum.[8] The Colosseum is depicted on the Italian version of the five-cent euro coin.

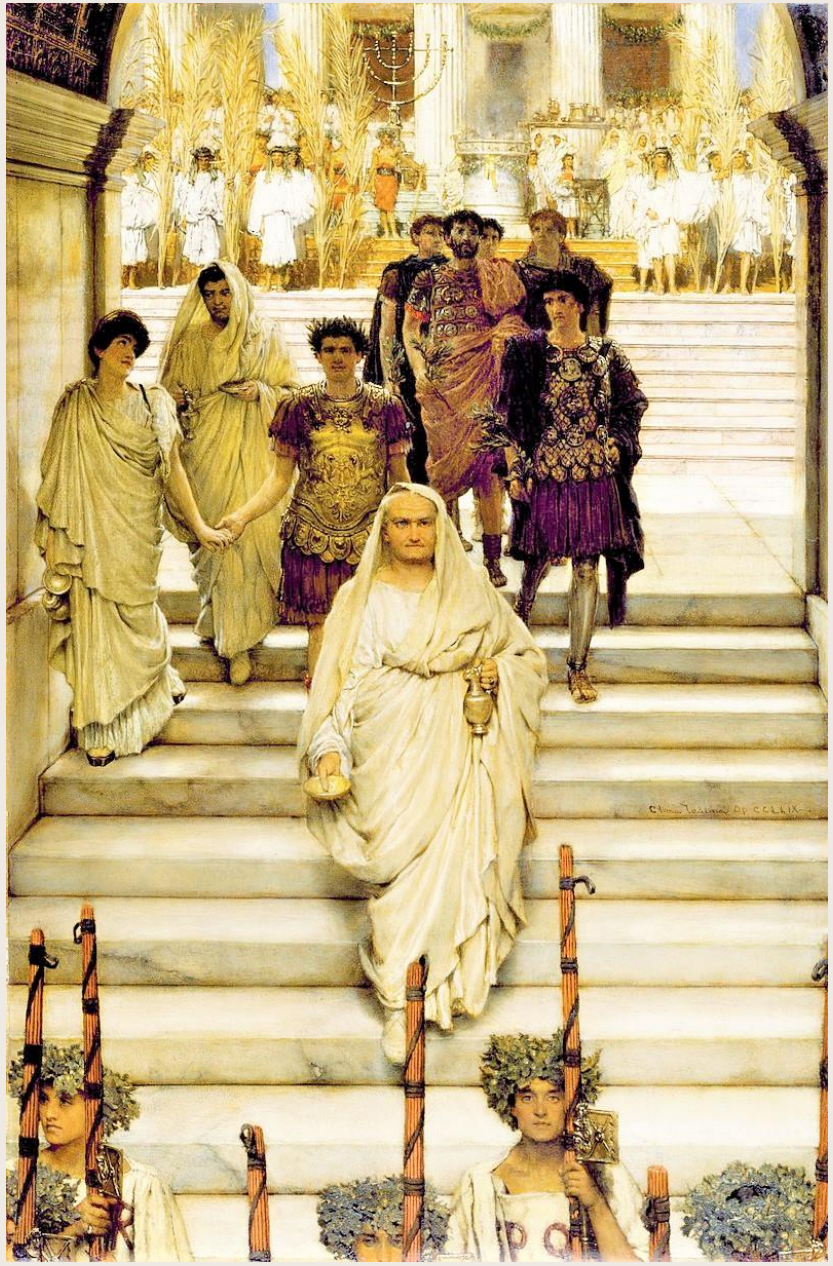
Vespasian 17 November AD 9 – 23/24 June 79) was a Roman emperor who reigned from AD 69 to 79. The fourth and last emperor who reigned in the Year of the Four Emperors, he founded the Flavian dynasty that ruled the Empire for 27 years. His fiscal reforms and consolidation of the empire generated political stability and a vast Roman building program.



Titus Caesar Vespasianus 30 December 39 – 13 September 81 AD) was Roman emperor from 79 to 81. A member of the Flavian dynasty, Titus succeeded his father Vespasian upon his death.

Before becoming emperor, Titus gained renown as a military commander, serving under his father in Judea during the First Jewish–Roman War. The campaign came to a brief halt with the death of emperor Nero in 68, launching Vespasian's bid for the imperial power during the Year of the Four Emperors. When Vespasian was declared Emperor on 1 July 69, Titus was left in charge of ending the Jewish rebellion. In 70, he besieged and captured Jerusalem, and destroyed the city and the Second Temple. For this achievement Titus was awarded a triumph; the Arch of Titus commemorates his victory to this day.

Domitian 24 October 51 – 18 September 96) was a Roman emperor who reigned from 81 to 96. The son of Vespasian and the younger brother of Titus, his two predecessors on the throne, he was the last member of the Flavian dynasty. Described as "a ruthless but efficient autocrat", his authoritarian style of ruling put him at sharp odds with the Senate, whose powers he drastically curtailed.



The Flavian dynasty ruled the Roman Empire between AD 69 and 96, encompassing the reigns of Vespasian (69–79), and his two sons Titus (79–81) and Domitian (81–96). The Flavians rose to power during the civil war of 69, known as the Year of the Four Emperors. After Galba and Otho died in quick succession, Vitellius became emperor in mid 69. His claim to the throne was quickly challenged by legions stationed in the Eastern provinces, who declared their commander Vespasian emperor in his place. The Second Battle of Bedriacum tilted the balance decisively in favour of the Flavian forces, who entered Rome on 20 December. The following day, the Roman Senate officially declared Vespasian emperor of the Roman Empire, thus commencing the Flavian dynasty. Although the dynasty proved to be short-lived, several significant historic, economic and military events took place during their reign.

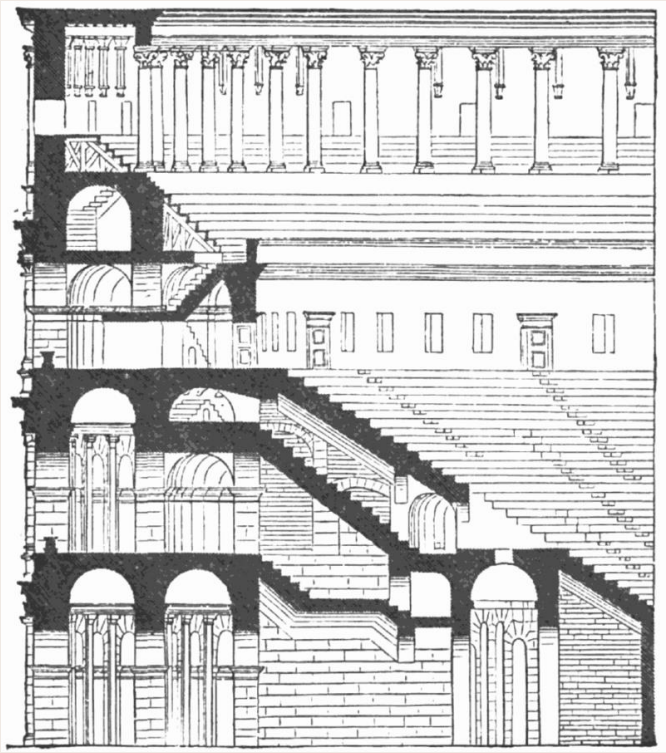
View of the Roman Forum from the Capitoline Museums in Rome.

The Roman Empire during the Year of the Four Emperors (69 CE). Blue areas indicate provinces loyal to Vespasian and Gaius Licinius Mucianus. Green areas indicate provinces loyal to Vitellius.

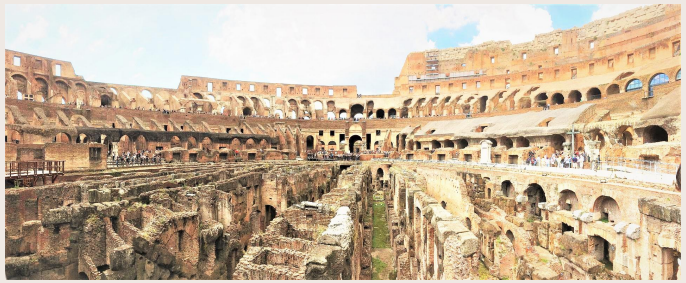
Name

Originally, the building's Latin name was simply the Latin: amphitheatrum, lit. 'amphitheatre'. Though the modern name Flavian Amphitheatre (Latin: Amphitheatrum Flavium) is often used, there is no evidence it was used in Classical Antiquity. This name refers to the patronage of the Flavian dynasty, during whose reigns the building was constructed, but the structure is better known as the Colosseum In antiquity, Romans may have referred to the Colosseum by the unofficial name Amphitheatrum Caesareum (with Caesareum an adjective pertaining to the title Caesar), but this name may have been strictly poetic as it was not exclusive to the Colosseum; Vespasian and Titus, builders of the Colosseum, also constructed a Flavian Amphitheatre in Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli)

The name Colosseum is believed to be derived from a colossal statue of Nero on the model of the Colossus of Rhodes. The giant bronze sculpture of Nero as a solar deity was moved to its position beside the amphitheatre by the emperor Hadrian (r. 117–138).The word colosseum is a neuter Latin noun formed from the adjective colosseus, meaning "gigantic" or "colossean". By the year 1000 the Latin name "Colosseum" had been coined to refer to the amphitheatre from the nearby "Colossus Solis".



History



The site chosen was a flat area on the floor of a low valley between the Caelian, Esquiline and Palatine Hills, through which a canalised stream ran as well as an artificial lake/marsh. By the 2nd century BC the area was densely inhabited. It was devastated by the Great Fire of Rome in 64 AD, following which Nero seized much of the area to add to his personal domain. He built the grandiose Domus Aurea on the site, in front of which he created an artificial lake surrounded by pavilions, gardens and porticoes. The existing Aqua Claudia aqueduct was extended to supply water to the area and the gigantic bronze Colossus of Nero was set up nearby at the entrance to the Domus Aurea.

Sestertius of Titus celebrating the inauguration of the Colosseum (minted 80 AD).

Although the Colossus was preserved, much of the Domus Aurea was torn down. The lake was filled in and the land reused as the location for the new Flavian Amphitheatre. Gladiatorial schools and other support buildings were constructed nearby within the former grounds of the Domus Aurea. Vespasian's decision to build the Colosseum on the site of Nero's lake can be seen as a populist gesture of returning to the people an area of the city which Nero had appropriated for his own use. In contrast to many other amphitheatres, which were on the outskirts of a city, the Colosseum was constructed in the city centre, in effect, placing it both symbolically and precisely at the heart of Rome.

Rome 1600:s

Construction of the Colosseum began under the rule of Vespasian[3] in around 70–72 AD (73–75 AD according to some sources). The Colosseum had been completed up to the third story by the time of Vespasian's death in 79. The top level was finished by his son, Titus, in 80, and the inaugural games were held in 80 or 81 AD. Dio Cassius recounts that over 9,000 wild animals were killed during the inaugural games of the amphitheatre. Commemorative coinage was issued celebrating the inauguration. The building was remodelled further under Vespasian's younger son, the newly designated Emperor Domitian, who constructed the hypogeum, a series of tunnels used to house animals and slaves. He also added a gallery to the top of the Colosseum to increase its seating capacity.

In 217, the Colosseum was badly damaged by a major fire (caused by lightning, according to Dio Cassius, which destroyed the wooden upper levels of the amphitheatre's interior. It was not fully repaired until about 240 and underwent further repairs in 250 or 252 and again in 320. Honorius banned the practice of gladiator fights in 399 and again in 404.

Gladiatorial fights are last mentioned around 435. An inscription records the restoration of various parts of the Colosseum under Theodosius II and Valentinian III (reigned 425–455), possibly to repair damage caused by a major earthquake in 443; more work followed in 484 and 508. The arena continued to be used for contests well into the 6th century. Animal hunts continued until at least 523, when Anicius Maximus celebrated his consulship with some venationes, criticised by King Theodoric the Great for their high cost.

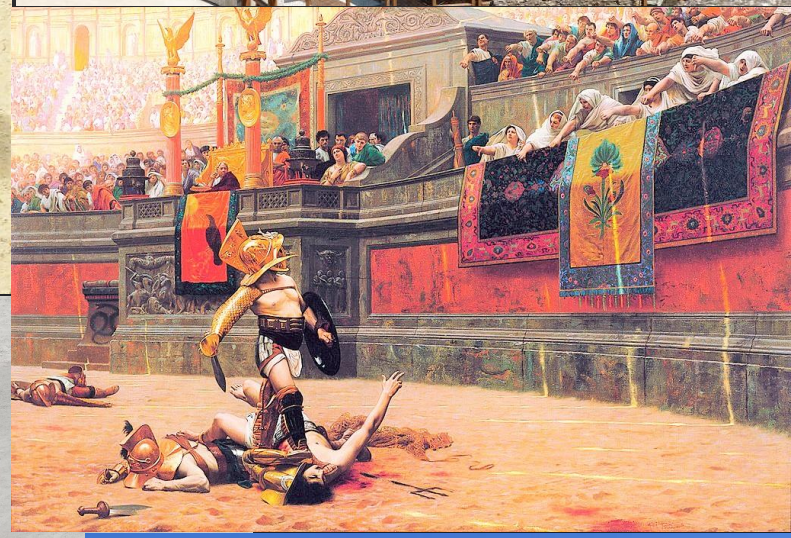
1870 view emphasizing the semi-rural environs of the Colosseum at the time

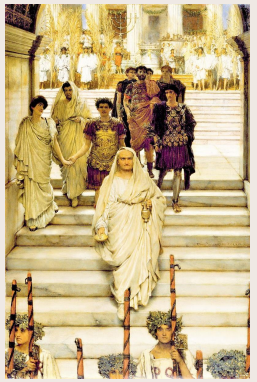
During the 16th and 17th century, Church officials sought a productive role for the Colosseum. Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590) planned to turn the building into a wool factory to provide employment for Rome's prostitutes, though this proposal fell through with his premature death. In 1671 Cardinal Altieri authorized its use for bullfights; a public outcry caused the idea to be hastily abandoned.

In 1749, Pope Benedict XIV endorsed the view that the Colosseum was a sacred site where early Christians had been martyred. He forbade the use of the Colosseum as a quarry and consecrated the building to the Passion of Christ and installed Stations of the Cross, declaring it sanctified by the blood of the Christian martyrs who perished there (see Significance in Christianity). However, there is no historical evidence to support Benedict's claim, nor is there even any evidence that anyone before the 16th century suggested this might be the case; the Catholic Encyclopedia concludes that there are no historical grounds for the supposition, other than the reasonably plausible conjecture that some of the many martyrs may well have been.

According to Mussolini: "Fascist education is moral, physical, social, and military: it aims to create a complete and harmoniously developed human, a fascist one according to our views". Mussolini structured this process taking in view the emotional side of childhood: "Childhood and adolescence alike ... cannot be fed solely by concerts, theories, and abstract teaching.

Later popes initiated various stabilization and restoration projects, removing the extensive vegetation which had overgrown the structure and threatened to damage it further. The façade was reinforced with triangular brick wedges in 1807 and 1827, and the interior was repaired in 1831, 1846 and in the 1930s. The arena substructure was partly excavated in 1810–1814 and 1874 and was fully exposed under Benito Mussolini in the 1930s





The Colosseum is today one of Rome's most popular tourist attractions, receiving millions of visitors annually. The effects of pollution and general deterioration over time prompted a major restoration programme carried out between 1993 and 2000, at a cost of Lire 40 billion ($19.3m / €20.6m at 2000 prices).